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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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INFORMATION

October 8, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Viron P. Vaky

SUBJECT: Bolivia

*2 agree with
pres. contact*
He

CIA has an idea about Bolivia which is worth considering, they will probably raise it with you.

OCT 12 1970

They suggest that we make a quick approach to General Torres to let him know that we are not automatically his enemy; we know he has his problems but if he acts relatively reasonably we could establish a sensible modus vivendi. The purpose of this would be to give him an alternative to far-out radicalization; if we wait to see what he does he may assume our passivity to be opposition. He may then come to believe he may as well radicalize anyway to legitimize himself and reason that the left extremists are the only elements that will support him.

The assumption underlying this suggestion is that Torres is not unredeemable (as, for example, Allende might be). This may not be a bad assumption, as a close reading of his biography indicates (see attached). He is an enigma. He started out as a conservative; he planned the campaign that finished off Che Guevara; only recently has he become publicly a left-wing statist. In truth he is probably an opportunist interested in power, who may see left-wing populism as the best road to power now.

In any case, the argument goes, we would have nothing to lose by making the first approach to Torres. If he is a dedicated leftist and anti-US he will rebuff us. If he is interested primarily in power, knowledge that he may be able to get our support (or avoid our enmity) might just moderate his attitude and make us a force he may wish to placate or even eventually cater to, depending on how he sees his interests. If we do not make the pitch early, we may lose an opportunity because we can be sure that the leftists--labor and students--will lose no time in trying to sew him up.

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What intrigues me about this argument are suggestions that Torres is trying to keep his independence. Despite 20 extreme demands presented to him by extremist labor groups yesterday as the price for their support, it is not clear that he has yet accepted them. Most interestingly, he is reported in a press report to have said that his government will respect the previous Government's agreement to pay compensation for the Gulf properties--a straw in the wind if true.

We could signal this approach in one of two ways--a very prompt recognition (or announcement of "continuing relations") or a quick, private contact.

I favor the latter.

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Bolivia's Enigmatic Chief

Juan Jose Torres

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 7—He speaks of himself as "a man of the people," but much of his life has been spent as a member of a middle-class elite.

He speaks of himself as a revolutionary, yet he frowns on extremists of the right and the left, and he was instrumental in the

Man death of a revolutionary idol. He

in the is, in brief, an

News enigma: Juan José

Torres, a short, stocky professional military officer who was thrust to the height of power yesterday as the new President of Bolivia in the climax of the latest upheaval of his country's political life.

After a lifetime spent in relative obscurity, General Torres emerged suddenly to proclaim himself leader of the "revolution of the people" to capture control of a loose alliance of left-wing civilians and officers and to turn the right-wing coup that began Sunday into a leftist takeover.

Though the mustachioed General calls himself a "revolutionary nationalist," no observer is certain what that will mean in Bolivia.

His past holds elements of contradiction and irony—a former staunch opposition to violent revolution and all brands of leftist ideology won him a reputation as a rightist; yet he participated in a coup that brought to power a regime with leftist and nationalist tendencies.

Physically and culturally, the 49-year-old army general, who has survived the purges and political infighting that have characterized military life in Bolivia, is a man of mixed background.

His dark eyes and high cheekbones in a darkly reddish face are characteristically Indian, and he is fond of reminding his listeners that he came from a poor family of Indian background in Cochabamba, where he was born on March 5, 1921.

But he was trained at the Bolivian military academy, which made him by education a member of the Bolivian middle class and by profession a member of an elite.

Known as a man whose smiles fail to distract from his cold eyes, he rose most



Associated Press

Not easily labeled

12-year presidency of Victor Paz Estenssoro, who achieved office after a revolt by miners and young officers. By the time the Paz presidency was ended in 1964, Captain Torres, who had helped him to office, was a colonel.

As Colonel Torres, he supported the military coup that finished the leftist and democratic Paz regime. Subsequently, under the late President Rene Barrientos Ortuño, an air force officer, he served as Ambassador to Uruguay and briefly as Minister of Labor and Social Security.

His solid, if not brilliant army career, included field commands, services as a teacher at the Bolivian military academy, and staff duty. In 1967, with the rank of General, he was named Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.

It was this assignment that brought the man who called himself a revolutionary into an ironic conflict with Ernesto Che Guevara, the revolutionary idol. It was General Torres who planned the United States-supported operation against the Cuban guerrilla that resulted in Guevara's death in 1967.

But for a long time, his principal alliance had been with General Alfredo Ovando Candia, who had been senior military officer when the government had faced the threat. With General Ovando, General Torres had been one

of the senior group of army commanders who approved the order that Guevara was to be killed if captured.

In September, 1969, General Torres joined General Ovando in a coup that overthrew the regime of Luis Adolfo Siles Salinas and brought to power a military regime with strong leftist and nationalist overtones. General Torres was immediately named chief of the armed forces.

When General Barrientos died in an airplane crash in April, 1969, General Torres continued to serve in the succeeding civilian government.

Presumably after this time, General Torres's leftist sympathies began to emerge. He praised Premier Fidel Castro and approved the Ovando regime's nationalization of United States corporations' mining properties.

General Ovando, under pressure to crack down on leftists, discharged General Torres in July, retiring him from the army. At this point, General Torres's friends reported, he began talking revolution. When the opportunity appeared Sunday, General Torres was ready.

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